

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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P 241138Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6400

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 12230

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, VS, TH

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND

REF: A) STATE 133652 B) BANGKOK 9487 C) STATE 129712 D)

D) VIENTIANE 4008

SUMMARY: IT HAS BEEN A LITTLE MORE THAN TWO MONTHS SINCE THE FLOW STARTED AND THE OVERALL REFUGEE PROBLEM IN THAILAND REMAINS NO NEARER A SOLUTION THAN IT DID THE DAY THE FIRST REFUGEES ARRIVED FROM PHNOM PENH. THE ONLY CHANGE HAS BEEN IN THE INCREASE IN THEIR NUMBERS SINCE THE FALL OF SAIGON AND MORE RECENTLY THE RADICAL POLITICAL CHANGE IN LAOS RESULTING IN THE FLOW OF REFUGEES FROM THAT QUARTER. THE DETERIORATING CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THESE REFUGEES EXIST ARE MORALLY AND PHYSICALLY DEBILITATING. THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT (RTG) WILL NOT ACCEPT ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESETTLEMENT OF THE REFUGEES THOUGH IT IS PROVIDING MINIMAL SUBSISTENCE. THE UNHCR HAS NOT VISITED A REFUGEE CAMP YET, HAS PROVIDED NO MATERIAL ASSISTANCE TO THE CAMPS AND IS ONLY NOW MOVING TO START A SURVEY OF EACH CAMP. OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICE AND INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS HAVE PROVIDED LIMITED ASSISTANCE TO THE REFUGEES BUT WITHOUT THE DIRECT COOPERATION OF THE RTG. OTHER EMBASSIES HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TAKE SMALL NUMBERS OF REFUGEES, BUT THE NUMBERS ARE NOT LARGE ENOUGH TO OFFER A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM.

IN AN EFFORT TO END THIS IMPASSE AND RESCUE THE REFUGEES FROM THEIR CURRENT UNSATISFACTORY SITUATION, WE

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RECOMMEND THAT THIS EMBASSY BE GIVEN EXPANDED PAROLE

AUTHORITY TO COVER CAMBODIANS, VIETNAMESE AND LAOTIANS IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES.

- REFUGEES WITH ANY RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES
- REFUGEES WITH SPONSORS IN THE UNITED STATES
- REFUGEES WHO WOULD APPEAR TO FACE PRISON OR DEATH IF RETURNED TO THEIR NATIVE COUNTRIES
- REFUGEES WHO HAVE WORKED FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT WITHIN THE LAST FIVE YEARS
- FORMER DIPLOMATS WHO HAVE STILL NOT BEEN ABLE TO FIND A COUNTRY OF RESETTLEMENT. END SUMMARY

1. COLLAPSE OF THE NON-COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS IN INDOCHINA HAS BROUGHT PERSONAL TRAGEDY TO MILLIONS OF CAMBODIANS, VIETNAMESE AND LAOTIANS. MANY OF THOSE WHO FLED THEIR COUNTRIES ARE STILL IN LIMBO. THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS ACTED WITH COMPASSION AND HAS DONE AN EXCELLENT JOB OF MOVING LARGE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES FOR RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES. THERE ARE OTHER REFUGEES, HOWEVER, WHO ARE NOT SO FORTUNATE.

2. THAILAND BY VIRTUE OF ITS LOCATION HAS RECEIVED A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE REFUGEE FLOW. WE ESTIMATE THAT THERE ARE STILL SOME 2,000 VIETNAMESE AND ABOUT 7,000 CAMBODIANS IN THAILAND. THERE ARE ALSO ABOUT 500 LAOTIANS IN THAILAND WHO HAVE SOUGHT POLITICAL ASYLUM, AND THE U.S. EMBASSY IN VIENTIANE HAS ESTIMATED THAT THERE MIGHT BE 1,500 OVERALL WHO WOULD SEEK ASYLUM FROM US. (REF D) UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW AND TRADITION THESE REFUGEES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE RTG, AND INDEED THE RTG DOES ADMINISTER THE CAMPS WHERE MOST OF THE REFUGEES LIVE. FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS, HOWEVER, THE RTG HAS REMAINED AND IS LIKELY TO REMAIN FIRMLY OPPOSED TO ALLOWING MOST OF THESE REFUGEES TO STAY IN THAILAND (REF B). THE RTG HAS MADE THIS KNOWN TO THE REFUGEES. THE REFUGEES WITH LOYALTIES AND CONNECTIONS TO THE FORMER ANTI-COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS IN PHNOM PENH, SAIGON, AND VIENTIANE ARE AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THAILAND AT A TIME WHEN IT IS TRYING TO ADJUST ITS FOREIGN POLICY AND DEVELOP WORKABLE RELATIONS WITH THE NEW COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS. DOMESTICALLY, TRADITIONAL THAI PREJUDICES COME INTO PLAY, AND THESE ETHNIC GROUPS ARE NOT POPULAR. THE RTG

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CAN ALSO SEE SOME JUSTIFICATION FOR REFUSING RESETTLEMENT SINCE VERY FEW OF THE REFUGEES WANT TO REMAIN IN THAILAND. THE THAI SEEM TO HOPE THAT WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME MANY OF THESE REFUGEES WILL BE WILLING TO RETURN TO THEIR OWN COUNTRIES. THIS VIEW APPEARS TO US TOTALLY UNREALISTIC. THE THAI PRESS ON JUNE 23 HEADLINES THE REPORT THAT MANY OF THE KHMER WHO RETURNED TO CAMBODIA HAVE BEEN KILLED.

3. AS A RESULT, THE RTG HAS DONE LITTLE MORE THAN GIVE TEMPORARY SHELTER AND IN SOME CAMPS, PROVIDE A MINIMAL DIET. THE CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS BECOME WORSE EACH DAY. PART OF THE TRAGEDY OF THE SITUATION IS THAT INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS WHO ARE ABLE AND WILLING TO HELP WITH SUBSISTENCE ARE KEPT AT ARMS LENGTH BY THE RTG AND HAVE UNOFFICIALLY PROVIDED ONLY LIMITED HELP, WITHOUT WORKING THROUGH THE RTG. THE UNHCR, WHICH ALSO COULD PROVIDE MATERIAL SUPPORT FOR THE REFUGEE CAMPS, STATES THAT IT CANNOT HELP UNLESS IT RECEIVES A FORMAL REQUEST FROM THE THAIS. SOME EMBASSIES IN BANGKOK HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TAKE SMALL NUMBERS OF REFUGEES FOR RESETTLEMENT BUT THIS HAS MADE LITTLE IMPACT ON THE OVERALL PROBLEM.

4. THE UNITED STATES HAS HELPED. FIRST WE RECEIVED PAROLE AUTHORIZATION FOR CAMBODIANS WHICH WAS BROAD ENOUGH TO INCLUDE HIGH RISK MILITARY AND CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. WE LATER RECEIVED THE CURRENT LIMITED PAROLE AUTHORITY FOR BOTH VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIANS. THIS HAS ALLOWED US TO HELP WITH THE MOST OBVIOUS CASES WHERE WE BEAR RESPONSIBILITY.

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FINALLY WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE DEPARTMENT HAS INITIATED A REQUEST FOR PAROLE AUTHORITY FOR LAOTIANS (REF C).

5. WE HOPE THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT WILL ACKNOWLEDGE ITS RESPONSIBILITY FOR AS BROAD A GROUP OF THESE REMAINING REFUGEES AS POSSIBLE, SIMPLIFY PROCESSING PROCEDURES AND MOVE THESE PEOPLE AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE TO THE UNITED STATES. TO DO LESS WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT TO ABANDONING

SEVERAL THOUSAND CAMBODIANS, VIETNAMESE AND LAOTIANS TO WHAT IS AT BEST AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE, AT WORST THEIR DEATHS.

6. WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT THE UNITED STATES ACCEPT AS REFUGEES ALL CAMBODIANS, VIETNAMESE AND LAOTIANS IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:

- REFUGEES WITH ANY RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES. THE RELATIVES SHOULD NOT HAVE TO BE CITIZENS OR PERMANENT RESIDENT ALIENS.
- REFUGEES WITH SPONSORS IN THE UNITED STATES.
- REFUGEES WHO WERE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FORMER GOVERNMENTS OF CAMBODIA, VIETNAM, AND LAOS. MOST OF THESE "HIGH RISK" REFUGEES WOULD SUFFER PRISON OR DEATH IF THEY WERE FORCED TO RETURN TO THEIR FORMER HOMES.
- REFUGEES WHO HAVE WORKED FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT WITHIN THE LAST FIVE YEARS.
- FORMER DIPLOMATS WHO HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO FIND A COUNTRY FOR RESETTLEMENT.

7. WITHIN THE THREE GROUPS OF REFUGEES WE FACE THE FOLLOWING SECRET

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PROBLEMS:

A) CAMBODIANS - WE HAVE NEARLY EXHAUSTED OUR EARLIER AUTHORIZATION TO PAROLE INTO THE UNITED STATES SOME 2,400 KHMER, INCLUDING HIGH RISK PEOPLE, MAP FUNDED TRAINEES, THOSE WHO BROUGHT MAP EQUIPMENT TO THAILAND AND DIPLOMATS. WITHOUT DIRECT ACCESS AND WITH LIMITED INFORMATION ON THE REFUGEE CAMPS IN THE BORDER AREAS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE HOW MANY MORE KHMER WE SHOULD TAKE TO MEET OUR RESPONSIBILITY. WHEN THE ONGOING SURVEY BY CRS IS COMPLETED WE WILL HAVE A FAIRLY PRECISE IDEA OF WHERE WE STAND. FOR NOW WE CAN ONLY GIVE A VERY ROUGH ESTIMATE OF THESE KHMER WE SHOULD TAKE:

250 HIGH RISK MILITARY AND FAMILIES (ABOVE THE RANK OF MAJOR).

350 HIGH RISK MILITARY AND FAMILIES (OFFICERS BELOW THE RANK OF MAJOR).

300 HIGH RISK CIVILIANS AND FAMILIES (INCLUDING IN TAM AND FAMILY).

200 SOLDIERS WHO BROUGHT MAP EQUIPMENT OUT OF CAMBODIA.

70 DIPLOMATS FROM THE KHMER EMBASSY IN VIENTIANE.

100 REFUGEES WITH RELATIVES OR SPONSORS IN THE U.S.

B) VIETNAMESE - THE NUMBERS OF VIETNAMESE ARE SMALLER AND SOME FALL UNDER OUR EXISTING PAROLE AUTHORITY. AGAIN WE WILL HAVE MORE RELIABLE INFORMATION AFTER THE YMCA COMPLETES ITS SURVEY OF KLONG YAI AND VAYAMA CAMPS BUT FOR NOW WE ESTIMATE:

800 HIGH RISK MILITARY AND CIVILIANS.

3000 REFUGEES WITH SPONSORS IN THE UNITED STATES.

300 REFUGEES WITH SOME RELATIVE IN THE U.S. OR WITH A

RELATIVE WHO IS NOT A CITIZEN OR RESIDENT ALIEN.

90 VIETNAMESE DIPLOMATS IN BANGKOK (SOME 40 HAVE BEEN ABLE TO FIND OTHER COUNTRIES OF RESETTLEMENT).

C) LAOTIANS - OF THE 500 ETHNIC LAO REFUGEES IN THAILAND ALMOST ALL ARE HIGH RISK MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WHO WORKED CLOSELY WITH THE UNITED STATES. WE SHOULD TAKE THEM ALL IF THEY WANT TO GO TO THE U.S. THE MEO REFUGEES ARE A SPECIAL CASE AND THE THAI, WITH OUR ASSISTANCE, APPEAR WILLING TO RESETTLE THEM IN THAILAND, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THEIR LEADER VANG PAO, WHO HAS ALREADY LEFT.

8. OUR FINAL RECOMMENDATION IS THAT WITH THIS EXPANDED
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PAROLE AUTHORITY AS WELL AS WITH THE EXISTING VERY LIMITED ONE, WE BE ALLOWED TO RAPIDLY MOVE REFUGEES WHOM WE FIND QUALIFIED INTO THE UNITED STATES.

9. WE RECOGNIZE THAT WHAT WE ARE PROPOSING WILL REQUIRE A MAJOR DECISION. THERE SEEMS TO BE NO CHOICE. OUR MORAL RESPONSIBILITY WILL NOT GO AWAY. WE HAVE DONE SO MUCH ALREADY. WE STRONGLY BELIEVE WE SHOULD TAKE THE FINAL STEP AND COMPLETE OUR PART OF THIS REFUGEE PROBLEM. THIS WILL STILL LEAVE SEVERAL THOUSAND IN THAILAND TO BE HANDLED BY THE RTG AND INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES.
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